



THE HEADLESS CENTAURS :
their voyage and conquest -- by Hugh Fox



An Introduction of Sorts ...

Europe at the end of the Middle Ages was a closed shell. One God, one language, one religion, one social system. But outside the frontiers of Europe there always hummed an aura of the fabulous. The Alexander legends, the works of Marco Polo, the works of the ancient poets like Virgil maintained a spark of the "romantic," the "incredible."

Then the New World, America, was discovered. At first they believed it was under the control of the devil and the explorations were a combination of mercantilistic curiosity and religious crusade. Europe split wide open. The New World (or worlds because, after all, we're talking of Africa and the Far East as well) changed every neat concept in the European consciousness. In South America, especially, the Spaniards were confounded. These were barbarians, these people ... so ran the story. They were infidels, devil worshippers. And the Spaniards were Crusaders, bringers of Christ to the heathen. They really saw themselves that way.

From the beginning, though, it was not merely an encounter between Christ and Devil, but between Technology and non-Technology, between an industrializing and a non-industrial culture, between the Indians who lived in a myth-centered world and the Spaniards who lived half in myth and half in greed. The early Aztec codices make the Spanish out to be gods -- saw them and their horses as centaurs.

Christ, in this context, becomes a battle, a war god -- conquest means not only destruction and pillage, but the annihilation of all traces of the former Indian gods. The early chroniclers describe in great detail the customs of the Aztecs and Incas and Mayas. Within a decade there was nothing left to describe. Today, going through the ruins, through Monte Alban, Palenque, Chichan Itza, Pisco, Cuzco, Chan-Chan, from Mexico all the way to Lake Titicaca in Bolivia, you can only marvel at what the Spaniards must have destroyed. A great deal has been written recently on the mystiques of the Aztecs and Incas, and what emerges are cultures dominated by "spirit," by worship, by a genuine other-worldliness, a permeability between "this" and the "other" world.

Once the Spaniards had conquered the Indians, they began to quarrel among themselves and civil wars broke out. The influx of gold into Spain caused a fatal inflation and by the seventeenth century Spain itself was an empty desert. In both North and South America, though, the Indians were destroyed -- in South America physically by making them semi-slaves on farms and in mines, in North America by relegating them to reservations, mis-translating their names, mis-representing their ideals.

In North America in the nineteenth century the Ghost-Dance religion began, led by an Indian named Wovoka. He believed that by dancing a certain magical dance wearing magical shirts that the old days could be revived. However, those

who thought that the ghost-dance shirts were impervious to bullets soon found out that magic didn't work against steel and the ghost-dance religion became a children's game.

Now in South America the Indian is still outside of the "civilization." It is difficult to say how many Indians in Bolivia and Peru don't speak Spanish, but it is often said that 70% of the population of Bolivia and Peru speak Aymara and Quechua. In Ecuador, Chile, Columbia, the Indian is still stepped on, semi-enslaved. In the U.S. he is outside the fringe of society, "subsidized" by the U.S. government, still exploited and/or ignored.

That is what Western Man did to the Non-Western World in America. He did or is trying to do the same to the Non-Western World in the Far East, the Middle-East, Africa, wherever he can.

* * *

About the title. From a conversation I had one night with Dukardo Hinestrosa, the Columbian Nadaista. He invented the collection title for Ediciones de la Frontera: *Pez sin Escamas* (Scaleless Fish). The Centaurs, of course, in the early CODICES are the Spanish on horses. The Aztecs depict man and horse as one animal. The Headless part I took as a symbolic meaning to refer to the fact that until the Spanish began the conquest of the New World (after the expulsion of the Moors, which significantly ended in 1492) they were "headless" in the sense that they had no more purpose. The New World conquest gave them purpose again. The Spanish historian Americo Castro and others, for example, see the conquest of America as an extension of the reconquest of Spain.

-- July 23, 1968, Providence, Rhode Island

THERE IS NOTHING NEW ABOUT WHAT WE ARE DOING IN VIET NAM. IT'S THE SAME THING WE DID TO THE AMERICAN INDIAN, THE SAME THING THAT THE SPANISH DID TO THE INCAS, AZTECS AND MAYAS -- THE SAME THING THAT ALL THE OCCIDENT HAS DONE TO ALL THE NON-OCCIDENTAL WORLD.

1.

Collochio

god-devil
speaketh unto them,
sometimes in the likeness of a
black dog,
sometimes in the likeness of
a black calf

(NOT AS WHITE AS ALBION
the sea-gull island
spreading its
fragrant wings across
innocuous seas,
overshadowing, shadowing over
unfragrant peoples):

THE BUILDING OF
FRIARIES AND NUNNERIES
AND CHAPELS
GOETH WONDERFULLY
FORWARD.

Ophir is as ophir does,
fills the need

to un-now

In my time,
the woods were
full of

slide (brass)
telescope into

owls and
beggars

some possible,
possible, possible
although improbable,
previously-proved-
impossible

howling talons
and empty eye-
sockets

to-come

and the owls always won.

2.

Now you see it,
now you ("On a good day you can hear the water
filling from the river which went
out of Eden to water the Garden)
don't.

Mind-eye man
sniffing un-reality
abstractly projects
paradiso terrestre to the North-East
and "our antipodes" to the South-West,
Paradise roared round with fire,
reachinguptothesky,
inviting hand to see,
eye to turn,
burn,
break,
through and through and through
persistence
out of reach,

in reach and
he'll (generic) ignore it.

3.

The Lord of the Elephants
(gold, silver, pearles --
and precious stones)
snorts at the feathered dawn
(from) behind his (to him) invisible fire-wall,
waiting without knowing he is waiting, in his
known-unknown world
to be discovered -- and destroyed.

Talking to the devil (god),
never eating off the same
dishes twice,
never wearing the same clothes
twice:
the sun sweats, weeps,
vomitts
gold
and the aviaries scream
with the idolatry of
such opulence.

the barbarians are,
these are
the barbarians
are

still

on the other side
of the wall.

4.

Only the silver-gold wheels
turn.
The titles come first,
the spoor before the slaughter,

gold plants,
 corn fields with
silver stalks, gold ears,
gold rabbits, mice, snakes,
lizards, butterflies,
gold birds in gold trees,
lions, tigers, gold and silver baths
with gold and silver pipes,

 water is innocent that doesn't know the
 hand that touches it,
 air through the trees,
 rain,

The value of a thing is
in its itness, itself,
what it is, what it is
in itself

Don Diego Dado ha dado dados a

On the seventh
day of the seventh
year, this seventh son of a
seventh son,
hearing seven
peacocks
scream above the snorting of his
swine,
carefully balances his severed
head on its bloody
stalk,
evokes the name of
Santiago
seven times,
and the break is healed.

Que sui-je?

Je suis l'âme errante.

5.

The four stars of the Southern Cross
 held up against the

("Boanerges, filii
tonitruum.") in(un)fidel(faithful),

faith in the orthodoxy of Paradise,
pearls around his neck
strings of love-trysts

as I lay me down to dust

and

longi
tude
lati

drown in the
sound of
diving water.

Vidi quattro stelle

non viste mai furo ch'alla prima gente,

anihilating the
self-shell (sin) able-unable
(lo que Dios quiera)
to say
Here,
Now,
without the (pre) conditions
of Allah
and some crusade.

Don Diego feels the wind, and the stars become,
not a cross, but a

mandolin,
but he thinks
cross, splits down through his Manichee center,
And wind becomes merely the leaven of the great dough sails.

6.

Trapalanda,

night now
and the moon rises in slow motion,
negative fuchsia riders on negative fuchsia horses
flow
through the up-to-the-horses-
knees
hairgrass,
water-arcs
falling, the bounce, swing
(slow motion)
stride of
out-of (after)
time.

Negative magenta now, the
invaders
come on the back
of thunder, four footed
spitting fire,
Don Diego opens his mouth,
a thousand natives die,
when he blinks Tonacatecuhtli and Tonacacihuatl
fall like flaming arrows,
the grasslands dry, begin to burn,
far away, on the other side of the mountains,
the Lord of the Elephants,
over the sounds of birds and flowing water,
hears the first wails of terror begin to rise.
Nor do these tears mean the coming of
rain,
this blood nourish the re-coming of
the sun.

7.

The sun never sets,
the corn withers,
the grass dies,
the dustspots spread,
the Lord of the Elephants encircles Don Diego and the
other centaurs
with winds,
dust walls whirling round them in the mountains as they
move inland,
only their dogs bark, break the windwalls, and he calls
up fire,
speaks and the sky is filled with fire-lances
that the centaurs meet with firetongues spit out of their
own mouths.

Rabbits, owls, wild boars and the agate-eyed puma,
the Lord of the Elephants' flesh melts, dissolves,
and he spreads out like an outstretched hand,
moving between the multiple death-life worlds.

I dress myself in the skin of my victim
because the world is being born again,
my victim touches the face of the gods,
he moves up, forever to live with them.

The Now dissolving dissolves the dry grass and the earth,
tempers the burning sun,
the wind gods carry me aloft,
and now, immune, I burn the sun,
the sun no longer burns me.

8.

The Time of the Ocelot begins
We shall be slaughtered
in battle,

the best among us
shall be taken captive,

we shall be sold
into slavery,

the sky rains
knives and
serpents,

the rivers swell
with pestilence, my
people are covered
with sores,

my temples fall,
my images are
broken and trampled,

my tongues
fall silent,
my gods fall
from their skies

the rains stop
the winds die

Señora nuestra Chalchiuhtlicue y Chalchiuhtlatonac, fill
the hearts of thy faithful with thy love.

9.

Odin, Thor, Frey
roar blood, the
cycle is complete.

Thorvald pulls the arrows from his armpit and
Tici-Viracocha

WHOEVER CALLS UPON THE
NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE
SAVED

BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL,
AND DO NOT FORGET ALL HE
HATH DONE FOR THEE

YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST,
MEMBER FOR MEMBER

FROM THE RISING OF THE
SUN UNTO ITS GOING DOWN,
THE NAME OF THE LORD IS
WORTHY OF PRAISE

THE LORD IS THE PORTION OF
MY INHERITANCE

IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE
NATIONS OF THE EARTH BE
BLESSED

splits, explodes, fragments,
and the sky begins to bleed.
John Hawkins, the rat-eater,
arises from his tomb in Cornwall,
skeletal hand reaching out,
seeking land that his eyeless
eye sockets cannot hope to see, and
all the statues of our dead ancestors
melt and soak (disappearing) into the
ground,
the magenta-colored skies open and
vomit down Humphrey Gilbert,
sword in hand, naming the mountains
of the moon Albion,
as the burial mounds break open
and the dust of the dead is
carried aloft in a dull,
brown cloud.

I claim
I claim this land for
this land
I clamor for

the establishment of the
NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM
I
EYE
everywhere
but not a drop to
drink.

10.

The centaurs run round the high towers,
circle the walls,
gain strength as their hooves touch the earth,
only the antipodes, linked with ligaments to the skies,
are uncertain about the efficacy of their arms,
so that, even when they make resistance,
it is always with a spirit-arm
strapped behind their backs.
Hell against heaven hounds,
and even the antipodes believe
in the
divinity of the
centaurs.

In Guernica I come to see
The sacred oak that waits for me.

Don Diego Dado came to the town
Don Diego Dado blew the walls down,

Long daggers, short swords,
crossbowmen, harsh words,
and (as the black vultures
come screaming down the day
darkens, the earth splits,
the sky fills with screams
and the smell of burning
flesh)

the extra push of
valor (stout wink) that
pulls a
true believer
through.

11.

Quetzalcoatl-Tici-Viracocha
sallies forth on the sunplain,
brandishing his war-axe
and
God the Father,
lightning streaming from his palms,
raises his hands
and Quetzalcoatl-Tici-Viracocha
is stunned, stumbles to the
cloud edges and falls,
down,
in midfall extends his arms
which flower plumes
and
arising he claps his wings
as the Spiritu Sanctus,
black-bat winged,
its beak stained with blood,
swoops down to meet him,
and when they touch the skies explode,
the clouds burn like dry grass and
Christ the Musketmaker takes aim,
but as Tepeyolohtli roars the musket shatters
and Christ, raising up his punctured hands,
drowns the world in his blood.
Santiago, patron of
Cannons,

orare pro nobis,

Arbitrator of
Arquebuses,

orare pro nobis,

Master of the
Crossbow,

orare pro nobis,

Forger of swords,
Pickaxes and
Iron bars,

Why pursue this war?

I am sorry to
have destroyed
your cities

and burned

your people

orare pro nobis,

orare pro nobis,

orare

pro

nobis.

But I cannot, will not, leave; and even if I leave,
or even if you kill me, I will be replaced and the
conquest will be accomplished, because the destiny
of the world is that

geometry shall
destroy magic.

12.

Bodies the color of ripe corn,
bodies as white as
cornstalk buds,
the buds of the maguey,
beheaded bodies,
armless bodies,
legless bodies,
bodies mutilated and torn.

The ideas remain intact,
the rectangularity of the
chessboard remains
unchanged,
the outline of the
castle, knight, bishop,
pawn,
move foreward through
time,
but the bodies are
heaped, buried, burned.

13.

The ransom-eyed King of the Elephants,
held captive in the blue tower overlooking
the forty-fifth curve of the green lagoon,
is taught
to
play
chess.

N-QB3

the interlude of memory,
foam sandals and gold
rattles,
ocelot skin
bound on her
calf and
water lilies on
her

R-QB1

shield, which she
twirls above
her head in

R(1)-K7 ch

circles, the songs and
dances of Tecuilhuitontli
were of love and
sweet

QN-QZ

stories, they unbound
their hair which
covered them like

N(Q5)-K 7 ch

cloaks, the goddess
of the young corn,
about to die, with
a gold disk on a gold
chain around her
neck and wearing
carmine-colored

N-B3

sandals

Possessed (I am).
Christus Rey

Comes

The Last Judgement,

But not for me,
For me, but not
aloft, the bellows blow, the
cauldron of the damned.
Why are the faces so placid?
Why is there a need for a
hell after this life
here?

14.

The sun on my back I move through the metamorphoses of
wind to become
raven,
jaguar,
winged lion

and feathered serpent.

Held by iron chains I watch gold

masks
shields
goblets
brooches
earrings
necklaces

become rapiers and cinquedás, culverins, falconets, pikes,
blunderbusses, cutlasses, Derringers, pepperboxes, carbines,
mortars, Gatlings, Colt-Brownings, howitzers, torpedos,
and slowly soar

up
F-101 B's, F-105's, Thunderchiefs, F-8 Crusaders, Convair
F-106's, F-104 Starfighters, YF-12A's
Furies

Demons

Skyrays

Mercurys

Atlases

Mercury-Atlas D's,

only the earth that Mercury invents and Atlas sustains,
spinning sleekly hermetic and unplumbed,
without the respiration of
jade mosaic masks nor the hope-fear composite of jaguars
and plume-head-dressed fire-gods,
is faceless, mute, profane.

As the rooms fill with ransom the ghost-dance stops
and the four sacred directions of the
wind and universe
become the bearings of a compass.

15.

The sun on my back I look through the palm of my hand
and read the signs,
gold by weight instead of beauty,
beauty hung for being beautiful,
winds of locusts,
all the forms and symbols metamorphized or destroyed
("ahorcaron a dos indias, una doncella y la otra
recién casada ... porque eran muy hermosas....")

drowning, the cutting off of breasts, noses,
whatever part or organ that can be
cut, mutilated,
whatever variation of mutilation possible,
all the possibilities of variation,
the variations of possibilities,
performed,
excused --

WE ARE FEW
THEY ARE MANY....
MILITARY EXPEDIENCY,
NEED.

I look through my palm
and see myself weighed, measured,
melted down, and Agnus deified,
and as cuts rain down like raven beaks,
biting, gouging into my cheeks, my shoulders, chest, eyes,
I rise,
the world red through the lens of my own blood,
and make my own obsidian do to down me.

16.

They would have

les masques
gold labrets

worn,
broken

bas-relief en stuc,
jade plaques,

down, time
would have

les têtes en pierre
sculptées,
carved metates,

sucked them
all

les crânes en cristal
de roche, polychrome
incensarios

down its maw,

The Eagles of the East
would have killed the
Jaguars of the West,
the Serpents of the
North would have killed
the Ocelots of the South,

But
they would have been
them-
selves,
all with-
in
the compass of
their
their-
ness.

Earth

is,
can
not
be,

real,
either
every-
thing

has been in
vain,
or

there is
some
other
life

some
other
place

in the late
dust
wind
sun of
after-
noon

fad-
ing

flow-
ers
flowing,
stripped
in the
wind,

over the
edge of
day

in-
to
night,
over the
edge of
night

in-
to
day.

17.

After conquest,
civil war,
the blood still boiling after the fire is out,
the cannon-roar still echoing after the ball has struck,
the sky still dead after the volcano has receded back
into the ground.

Christ digests Viracocha,
the cat-god becomes
man,
the infinite welded to the finite,
man no longer welded to the
(cat, snake, bird, monkey, buffalo) world.

Centaur against centaur now,

Mass,
Cross,
Crusade,

and the eyes of the hills around the arena,
watch,
wonder,
why did they, these god-monsters,
why do they rumble across the rubble of our ruined world.

"For a long time we have wished to see you and hear the
words
that will give us understanding."

The corps of Arqubusiers advances,

SPAT

Don Diego Dado's left eye out,
bullets linked together by an
iron chain,

TWANG,

right leg, gone,

(Saint Lazarus, come forth from the tomb before the fifth
day, before your flesh is too far eaten by worms.)

The bar of his visor gone, ball against his forehead,
the five wounds of Christ and now a sixth, his reason,
gone,
he falls,
sprawls out across the maize-dust
and Don Fernando Scorpio,
both from Extremadura, swineherds both (all)
raises his lance
(Saint Lazarus, bury us in the walls of your sepulchur, and
save us from putrefaction)
and buries it in Don Diego's heart,
then with a sweep of his sword, as if he were
opening a huge and heavy book,
he beheads him, places his head on a pike and
declares himself victorious (over inertia).

18.

Purgation

Purification,

the dust of defeat settles,
the heads all gone,

the hands like blind eyes feel along the sun-warmed walls
for cracks and crevices.

How to make
wax,
wax
candles,
lighted in front
of the holy
altars and crosses,

You stop human sacrifices by sacrificing humans.

Chief Big Foot (defeat them with Vaudeville names)
dies,
struggling to rise,
frozen struggling,
his last gesture
effort
his last effort defeated,
but caught in the
gesture of struggle,
his will as long as he had will
willing against
them,
their death,
their cold,
their conversion,
his will his only reality,
as long as his reality stayed real.

One way to win.

The old men are dead,
the leaders of the young,
winter comes and we have no blankets,
the children are freezing,
those who escaped to the hills have no blankets
or food

Dead,
 among the dead,
 life among the dead,
 seek life, my life, my living, the living that
 made my life,
 among the dead.

19.

But even then, out of the stone crypt of acculturation,
the old ways,
tortured, twisted, grotesque,
not only survive, persist,
but thrive.

Wovoka:

"The sun died,
I arrived
up

(The Arapahos sing: "Father have
pity on me, I have nothing to
eat, I am dying of thirst --
everything is gone.")

in the place of

UNCHANGE

REGENERATION,

the world will come again,

dance Arapahos and Cheyennes,

Bannocks and Shoshones, Utes and

Paiutes,

hasten the day,

push time into

time-

less-

ness,

float,

impervious to

bullets and annuities,

over the hills

and the long grass,

blown by the winds

(Father, my father)

the world will come

again as it was."

Only when it didn't come?

The ghost-dance (Dance my people!)

became a children's game,

became a children's game,

but hums,

still hums,

still will be renewed,

the old ways

persist,

transformed.

20.

Only how can the ritual fire be maintained in the mine
tied by the unseen time

of sunup to sundown

the life round,

starting from and curving back to

blindness.

the capsule around me

changes,

grows notches, begins to

tick and clang,

grows rails, wheels,
wheezes,
sneezes,
expands.

I stare at the backs of my hands,
listen to my voice,
feel my feet on rock and dust,
reach out --
but the capsule of my world
expands faster than my mind
can run.

I listen for winds, grass
and the turning of the world,
water,
the hooves of day,
the screech of night,
but my mine-world
is impenetrable
and even when I emerge
I carry the skins of other
worlds around me.

What is new in the
whirlwind of conquest,
about death
emanating from the core of
a sanitized smile?

21.

The photographs are yellow,
feather, fringe, moccasin
and bead,
worn on other bodies
around other faces,
an ironic commentary on
vanished threats.

Heart safe behind yellow
photographs,
the eagle-bone war whistle
trapped mute on yellowed pages.

Safe, the treaties stand
broken, set, rebroken
now
and
now
and
now
into receding future now's of
spiralling significance.

The roof expands,
I rise up,
the center of the maize plant spreads
green across the sky,
out from its center a cloud comes,
I move across the center of the world,
the cloud and I move fast,
below the tribes gather,
the separate tribes,
the tribes that never
gathered before gather,
as the clouds close
in around them the
tribes gather in one
tribe.

My brothers of all the tribes,
rise to meet me,
swirl rising around me,
swirl around me,
rise,
and we merge,
the lines between us dissolve ...

as the vision fades
and the snow-wind outside circles
around the walls of my winter
as I sit in the middle of the floor in
the darkness, fold my arms and wait.

22.

The potlatch squeaks,
and the new (sanitary)
privy still
stinks
high.

"Some kind of
dance doll"
lies in the
corner

(Shoot my way out? With what? No more. Not even the idea.)

We bake bread
in ovens and
death is life,
cyclic,
regeneration,
renewal,
we are clouds,
rain,
and the leaking faucet
hardly penetrates the

mantle of our
minds.

EARTH-MOTHER

SUN-FATHER

WATER-GRANDFATHER

FIRE-GRANDMOTHER

CORN-BROTHERS
AND
SISTERS

In winter the planes drop hay and food
(when they come)
and in summer the
wind whips up the
dust dry
around the ankles of
our poverty.
We don't move toward,
our us
is preferable to the
handouts of hate
disguised as destiny.

Per Capita
Failure
Official Distrust
Indian Bureau
The Vacuum of
Bureaucracy

It is estimated that
acculturation
acculturation
acculturation

Tracoma,
Tracoma,
Tuberculosis,
Other,

augment,
although

The white man's path

the old
forms still
retain their

Over the steel cliff
Into the

forms
(hollow)

Mouth of oblivion.

Poor man in a white land,
broken hand,
handout,
you see what happens
if you sit it out
quietly,
you see what
happens if you roar,
fight back,
you see what
happens, poor man
in a white land,
you see.

-- Hugh Fox

Lima-Los Angeles, 1968

* * *

Translation Notes:

- Page 12, Lines 41-2: "What am I? I am the wandering spirit."
P. 13, L. 1-2: "Boanerges, sons of thunder."
P. 13, L. 14-5: "I saw four stars never seen before except by the first people."
P. 13, L. 18: "What God wills."
P. 20, L. 39-40: "They hung two Indians, a virgin and another one, recently married ... because they were very beautiful"